

Vaitl Carries On Family Tradition

BY SALLY BAIR

Lancaster Co. Correspondent
EPHRATA — Last Saturday when Florence Vaitl was sworn in as president of the Lancaster County Society of Farm Women, she was carrying on a family tradition. Florence, Ephrata, is the third generation of her family to be a member of Society #3.

She has been attending county board meetings regularly as second vice president, but Florence recalls that this was not her first experience going to county board, saying, "My mother was county secretary, and I went to my first executive board meeting when I was three-weeks-old." Her mother, Esther Stuber, also participated in the county convention last weekend, recalling with other events from the history of the county organization.

Florence adds, "I grew up in a family where you went to Farm Women on the third Saturday of the month." Children went along to meetings, and sometimes there may have been 20 to 30 children. It was a natural move, then, for her to become a full-fledged member at 14.

Her grandmother, Florence Mohler, was a charter member of Society #3. About her grandmother, Florence says, "For her time, she was very progressive in her thinking. I have my grandmother's diaries, and they were a very independent group of farm women."

The first societies in Pennsylvania were founded 70 years ago, and Florence says the idea was a good one for the time. With the life of rural women and farm women considerably different then, it gave women a chance to socialize with others. Florence says, "Remember, they didn't even have electrification."

Farm women took care of the house and the children, and for most of them, the chickens and garden were also their responsibility, according to Florence. "When I was a child, many of the programs were geared toward making the work that we had to do easier. We had programs on how to care

for the children, how to can foods safely, how to cook to maintain nutrients and other things to make life easier and better. Now our programs are interesting and stimulating, but they don't necessarily improve what we do. We are now all better educated."

However, Florence noted with amusement that a recent Farm Women program she visited featured a lady who does her own spinning. "We've come full circle," she concludes.

Florence is jumping prematurely into the president's seat, instead of following the traditional route of being elected to serve two years as second vice president, and two years as first vice president. She began serving her term as second vice-president, but quickly moved up the line of succession when first vice-president Hazel Ulrich remarried and realized she would be spending much of her time out of the area. Florence is not too concerned about the lapse, saying, "I have a very good first vice-president, and we will be electing a second vice president."

Her experience as past state president of the Pennsylvania Association of County-Affiliated Homes and as a graduate of the Leadership Lancaster will help her as she assumes her new role.

Florence states simply, "I hope to be an effective county president. There are some areas I want to look at, such as health. After all, we are an aging organization." Florence estimates that the average age of the society members is 60, and says that there are fewer charter members left.

She notes, "Right now, we are expected to have one safety meeting a year, and I would like to see that expanded to health. Health is an issue I want to deal with." She said the original intent of asking societies to hold a safety meeting had to do with educating them about the need for farm safety, particularly with children. "It was a major thrust — get children off farm equipment."

Another area of concern, she would like to address during her presidency is that of legislative

concerns. "All women should be active with good government, and we should be more aware of our individual roles in good government at all levels."

It made her happy that speakers at the recognition of Farm Women Day were both in government, and Florence noted that perhaps this could become a tradition. "I am inclined to promote it was a government day. We need to get better awareness in our local societies."

One of the speakers at the Farm Women Day program was Pennsylvania Senator Noah Wenger, whom Florence referred to as "a mover and shaker" in the farmland preservation movement. "He did stimulate some controversy and some questions."

The new county president says she understands the farmland preservation issue is "very controversial" and that there are "many sides to the coin." Nevertheless, she said that since 20 percent of the people make their living in farming or agri-business, it is an important part of the economy.

She adds, "I think we are in the business of helping to feed the world. I know there are surpluses, but there are also hungry people in the world. The problem has not been handled well. To lose farmland is to diminish our productivity to feed the world. The world's population is growing."

Florence also feels strongly that it must be preserved throughout the state, and she adds, "As long as there is a reasonable amount of farmland and rural people, there will be those who are interested in preserving the rural way of life, and willing to be members of Farm Women."

Since her membership in Farm Women included a 20 year hiatus while she lived elsewhere in Pennsylvania, Florence dates her involvement in Farm Women here in two segments. She says, "I was president of my society in my other life in Lancaster County. When I returned it was just like I had never left." She was in line to be president of her society again while serving as first vice-president of the county, but since she moved right into the presidency, she said she could never do both.

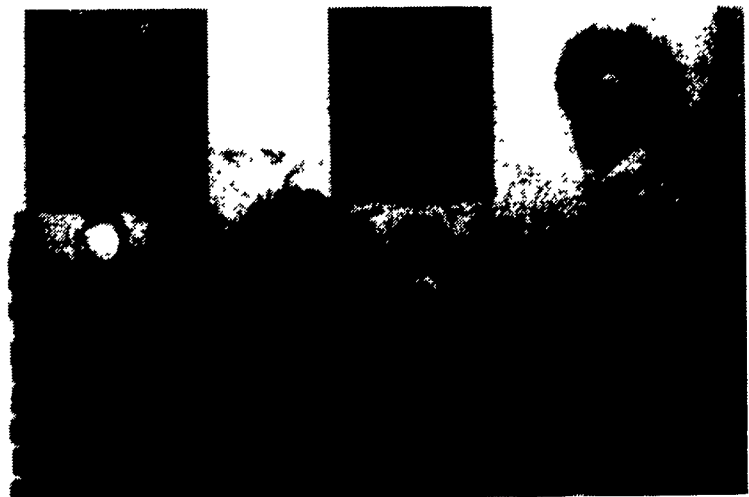
Since her society is in the middle of a major building program, working on a mobile kitchen to be used at their food booth at the Ephrata Fair, Florence says it will work out nicely for the present president to continue in the role and carry the project through to completion. Selling food at the Ephrata Fair is the major fundraiser of Society 3.

Working in the kitchen at the fair is a pleasure for Florence, and she gives credit to the members' husbands for their help. "One of the things we forget is that we couldn't do all this without the support of our husbands. It takes time and effort, and the men are very supportive and they help a lot at the fair." Her society recognizes the men once a year in appreciation for their understanding the "late suppers and the missed meals."

Florence feels strongly that the Farm Women Societies are filling a need for their members and for the communities. Last year they gave in excess of \$10,000 in charities, and as a county group they donated \$5,650 to the Water Street Rescue Mission and the Make A



Newly installed president Florence Vaitl encourages the farm women societies to make the next 70 years as memorial as the last 70.



Florence stands by the mantel of her Ephrata home. As she begins her presidency, she is looking forward to carrying on a family tradition of Farm Women service begun by her grandmother.

Wish Foundation. "They do a lot of volunteer work, and they serve as a support system for each other," Florence explains.

Serving as county president will keep Florence moving, and she said she looks forward to visiting many of the county societies. However, her professional life as a licensed nursing home administrator will soon be in full swing, and she said she will have to curtail the number of meetings she can attend.

Also, Florence adds, "My family is really important to me." Her family includes husband Rudolf, three children and four step-children.

She enjoys church work at

Bethany United Church of Christ, and in her spare time likes to go to flea markets. She said she also likes to use her long "row of cookbooks," and "I never get enough reading done."

Florence admits that she is "concerned" about the future of Farm Women, noting that her own society has just one charter member still living. She adds, "The charter members of other societies are well up in years."

However, with three generations of farm women in her history, she is looking forward to carrying on a personal tradition, and a tradition which she feels is good for farm women members and for the community.



Florence Vaitl, new president of the Lancaster County Society of Farm Women, goes over some of the records at the kitchen table in her Ephrata home. Florence has been a member of Society #3 since she was 14 and is the third generation of her family to be a member.

Homestead Notes